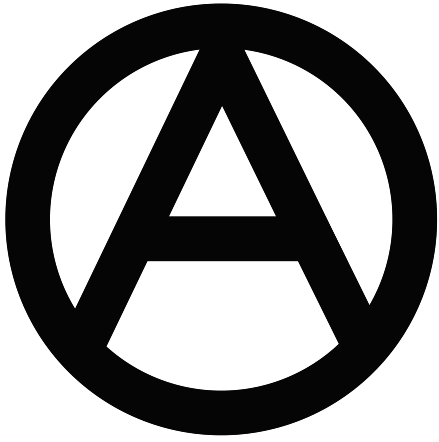
ANARCHIST CALISTHENICS

fitness of resistance



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Over the first half of 2025, the situation has worsened significantly. We've seen the capture of government by the most radical and fascistic elements of our political class. We've seen a tremendous erosion of civil liberties, and rights and resources for marginalized groups. We've watched as masked men abduct and deport our neighbors and loved ones for the crime of not being white.

And yet we've done next to nothing. For the vast majority of those on this continent, business continues as usual. Everyone who is paying even the slightest attention knows that the situation is dire. In reality we are stepping forward into a fascism more ugly and naked in its bloodthirsty intent than we've seen in many years. It is distressing, then, that there is a seeming collective paralysis among the so-called progressives and radicals, from liberal social democratic types all the way up to the socialists, communists, and even the anarchists. There has never been a more pressing time for direct action against the state and capital, and still we remain impotent, constantly on the back foot, and dangerously uncoordinated.

We still debate the ethics of property damage, looting and rioting, we still think within the bounds of permits, compliance, and constraints. Every single one of us has a little cop in our head. He's been cultivated by years of reinforcement from the day you've been born, by every teacher, parent, cop and politician keeping you within the bounds of acceptability. you learn to follow the rules at the cost of personal and social fulfillment, bodily autonomy, and even life and limb. the system is a force of nature, it need not be considered or justified, merely obeyed. a culture of fear and obedience becomes the norm, allowing us to then shirk our collective responsibility to each other to resist.

This deference to authority is pervasive throughout society, and restrains us from liberating ourselves. it kneecaps our potential revolutionary movements, it constrains our imaginations, and it breeds despair and disengagement.

What, then, is the solution to this predicament?

This is where the concept of Anarchist Calisthenics, first coined by James C Scott in his book Two Cheers For Anarchism, becomes relevant. Resistance is a lot like a muscle. It needs to frequently be exercised in order to build its strength and capacity. It can atrophy with disuse, and, like any fitness routine, it requires time and consistency to work your way up. Anarchist calisthenics then, is the practice of small everyday rule breaking, in order to build resilience and ability for larger acts of resistance.

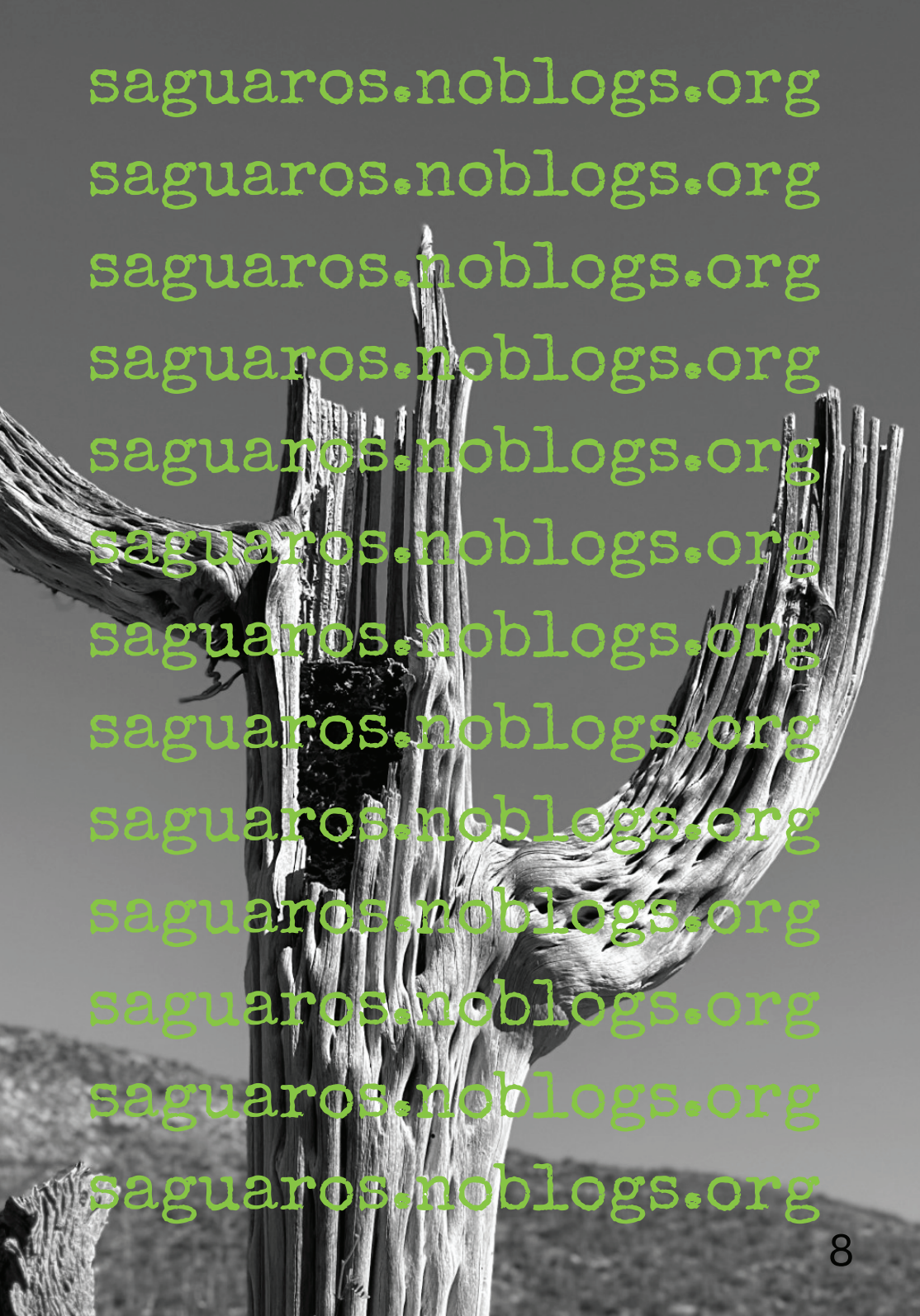
It is popular to think of a revolution as one discrete event with great clashes and heroic acts of bravery. This ignores the fact that revolutionary transformation takes place first socially, as a culture of resistance becomes pervasive enough to foment wide spread insurrection. Revolution is not only in the big moments of rupture, but in the small cumulative individual acts of resistance that take place every day, and in the spread of this every day insurrectionary culture among our communities. Revolution is to confer upon yourself the autonomy to judge for yourself whether a rule is justified, whether to abide by or to break it, and if so, how.

We can practice our small daily resistance in many different ways. Wander off the official path, hop over fences, and cross the road wherever suits you. Scrawl your tag where people will see it. Steal those supplies from your work and share them freely. Evade the fare, sneak in through the exit. Ask questions they discourage you from asking, and speak up against small injustices when you might have otherwise remained silent. Confront that creepy guy and make him leave. Steal that american flag and light it on fire. Take a five finger discount at the corporation's expense. Do whatever you can get away with. In these small acts of resistance, you teach yourself how to be free, how to act in courage, despite being in fear, and you come one step closer to manifesting liberation here and now. Anarchy is not just our goal and our method of liberation, but it is also a life to be lived, and a mode of existence. do your anarchist calisthenics, train the militant inside your soul.

This is a call to confront your fear. Each act will make the next one easier. Each risk will make the next risk easier to confront. You will find your inner flame and fan it into a roaring fire.

“One day you will be called on to break a big law in the name of justice and rationality. Everything will depend on it. You have to be ready. How are you going to prepare for that day when it really matters ? You have to stay 'in shape' so that when the big day comes you will be ready. What you need is 'anarchist calisthenics.' Every day or so break some trivial law that makes no sense, even if it's only jaywalking. Use your own head to judge whether a law is just or reasonable. That way, you'll keep trim; and when the big day comes, you'll be ready."

-James C. Scott, Two Cheers For Anarchism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